

# Exhibit 1

## *Character Letters*

December 14, 2024

The Honorable John F. Kness  
Northern District of Illinois, Eastern Division  
219 South Dearborn Street  
Chicago, Illinois 60604

Dear Judge Kness,

My name is John Butler, and this letter is in support of my son, Nathaniel Butler-Ludwig. I respectfully request that you take it, as well as the other letters of support on his behalf, into consideration as you make the painful, yet unfortunately necessary decisions, about his future. As you yourself noted at his last hearing, Nathaniel is a young man with a productive, law-abiding lifetime ahead of him once he has paid his debt to society. Please note that Nathan's entire family is looking forward to helping him make and sustain that transition once he has paid that debt.

Nathan's mother, Daniela Butler-Ludwig, and I met while I was on a year long exchange program in southern Germany. Soon after the exchange program, Daniela joined me in Tuscaloosa, AL as my wife as I finished my undergraduate degree. We returned to Germany for my military service, and then moved to St. Louis, MO, where Nathan was born, for me to pursue a masters program and start my civilian career. In 1996, we moved to Chicago for me to pursue a Ph.D. and work full time at the University of Chicago. His sister, Lily, was born shortly thereafter. In 2000, I left my job at the U of C, to be a stay-at-home father and concentrate on my studies for two years before returning to the workforce as a German teacher at the University of Chicago Laboratory Schools, the school each my children attended until their freshman year of high school.

It is easy to be nostalgic about those times. Nathan and Lily were growing up in a bilingual household, had a stay-at-home mother and then stay-at-home father, and enjoyed significant, regular contact with their families on both sides of the Atlantic. Nathan was an introverted and intelligent child, who was deeply empathetic with the thoughts and feelings of his peers, especially those who did not fit in with the cliquish and often demeaning peer social groups at the University of Chicago Laboratory Schools. Nathan always had a good read of the feelings of his friends even when they were not consciously trying to express them.

After years of failed attempts to make our marriage work, when it came time to tell Nathan and Lily that their parents were getting a divorce, we literally were only able to say "Your mother and I love..." before he cut us off and was already down the hall shutting himself into his room. From the perspective of time, I see now how the tensions and issues his mother and I had – in spite of very real attempts to shield them from it - had long term negative effects on our children, Nathan especially.

The announcement of our divorce was soon followed by a change in schools, as we could no longer afford the cost of the Laboratory School's tuition. Thankfully, Nathan was accepted into the International Baccalaureate program at Lincoln Park High School. However with none of the friends he had had since kindergarten, he lacked peer support that is critical to getting through the growing pains of the high school years. It was during his first year that his now well-documented anxiety, depression, and drug use began to manifest itself. His interest in school declined precipitously and often skipped his classes. His small circle of friends dwindled to almost none. And as is too often the case when an individual exhibits

mental health issues, Nathan was shunned and made to feel inferior by many of his classmates. At this point, Nathan's truancy was chronic and had to leave Lincoln Park High School.

Thanks to the alternative high school, Truman Middle College, Nathan was able to receive his high school diploma. He was also able to successfully complete an associates degree with honors in digital media and design from Harold Washington College. As his mental health issues continued to be a severe burden, earning that degree was a struggle, but he persisted. Nathan currently hopes to further his education at a four-year institution after his incarceration.

The silver lining in these years was his multiyear employment with Shoreline Sightseeing. As he willingly took on the early shift starting at 5 am and was never late for work, which could have held up an entire boat run for lack of personnel, he was well respected by his employer and received several raises. It was remarkable to see our otherwise paralyzingly introverted son, take on a customer facing role. His mother and I encouraged him to reflect on how he was able to be successful at Shoreline and apply that to other aspects of his life.

We are still hopeful that Nathan can and will turn himself around and lead a normal, productive life, and his entire family is ready to help him close this chapter of his life and chart a new course for himself once his debt to society has been paid. Please take the challenges Nathan has faced during his life into consideration when making your decisions.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be the initials 'JB' or a stylized 'B'.

John Butler

October 25, 2024

The Honorable John F. Kness  
Northern District of Illinois, Eastern Division  
219 South Dearborn Street  
Chicago, Illinois 60604

Dear Your Honor,

My name is Daniela Butler-Ludwig, and I am the mother of Nathaniel (Nathan) Butler-Ludwig.

I am a native of Germany and moved to the US after meeting Nathan's father as a college student and consequently after getting married we settled in St. Louis MO, where Nathan was born.

During his first years of life I was a stay-at-home mother to take care of him as this was a family value I cherished growing up in a small town in Germany.

We then moved to Chicago for Nathan's father's PhD program at the University of Chicago and where I have been working in alumni relations and development for over 20 years.

Nathan's father and I separated and then divorced when he was about 11 years old.

As a child Nathan was quiet, kind, intelligent, and thoughtful of others and often stood up for friends and classmates when other kids treated them badly and his teachers noted his as well. He has always been generous in sharing compliments and offered support to others.

The news of his parents separation was hard on Nathan, much more so than his younger sister at the time. Having to adjust to spend equal times at both parents home and going back and forth between different neighborhoods became difficult for Nathan to adjust to. Furthermore money became tight due to living in single parent households which resulted in having to pull Nathan out of the private school he attended since pre school and starting fresh in a much larger public school without any of his previous friends.

About that time Nathan started suffering from severe anxiety and depression which took a toll on his confidence and self-esteem and on his academic success. Academically he first tested into the IB high school program which then became quickly overwhelming for him as it became too difficult to learn and thrive under the burden of the illnesses.

He has been in counseling throughout his middle and high school years with little medial success.

After high school he enrolled at Harold Washington community college and received an associate degree with hopes to transfer to a 4-year college. Due to his mental health struggles, he was diagnosed years

later with bi-polar disease, depression, and other mental illnesses; it was difficult for Nathan to focus and pursue that goal at that time.

More recently he has found a counselor who diagnosed him, and he is now on a path to manage his illnesses and to focus on a better future. I could even see him working in a professional field that engages and supports members of society that struggle with similar issues as he understands their challenges.

His work ethic, despite his challenges was always strong. He was always on time and reliable and presented good customer service. When he was in high school, he worked as a deck hand on a Chicago River tour boat and was commended by guests and the captain for acting quickly when a passenger was distraught and needed assistance.

He currently is looking forward to finding a way to continue his education to be able to find a fulfilling career and employment.

Nathan has strong relationships with his German family, including cousins, uncle, aunt and especially his grandmother. He spent many summers with them and his cousins came visiting us in Chicago. He is currently in touch with all of them through email.

His 85-year-old grandmother is no longer able to travel due to recent carotid artery surgery, and it is weighing heavy on him that there is a chance he may not be able to see her again.

As his mother I miss him every day as communications are difficult via the systems in place and the feeling of helplessness is overwhelming. During the Covid lockdown Nathan and I spend many days and hours together to keep each other company and to cope with those challenges and we developed a much deeper connection.

He often helps me with difficult chores around the house or is there when I need him for example at doctors' visits, especially as the rest of our family is far away and cannot be there. His absence affects me deeply.

Lastly his sister is extremely sad and distraught about Nathan's challenges and has difficulties coping especially as we are getting closer to the holidays.

Thank you for taking the time to read my letter.

Sincerely,

Daniela Butler-Ludwig

5400 South Dorchester Avenue

Chicago IL 60615

G N M

Grace M. Nickels  
123 N. Desplaines St.  
Chicago, IL 60661  
July 29, 2024

Dear Your Honor,

My name is Grace Nickels, and I am a Notre Dame Law School alum originally from the western suburbs of Chicago. I have been practicing as a labor and employment attorney for four years in both private practice and as in-house counsel. I met Nate Butler-Ludwig when I was eighteen years old in 2013. He instantly became a friend to me and has remained as such for eleven years.

As a friend to me, Nate has been honest, selfless, and intentional. Nate had a more difficult upbringing than me growing up, yet he was always the first to be supportive of my successes as if they were his own. Nate has always been incredibly insightful and empathetic towards the suffering of others. Specifically, I can recall one instance when I reached out to Nate after a family member of mine passed away during finals week of 1L year. To no surprise, he listened intently, provided the reassurance I needed, and followed up often. Although I know that Nate simultaneously had his own set of struggles far greater than mine, he was always the first one to provide help, and for that I am grateful.

What has truly impressed me most about Nate's character has been his sincere acceptance of responsibility. When I first learned of and spoke to Nate about the mistake he made, he immediately took ownership of his actions and understood the consequences at stake. He did not make excuses nor did he minimize the impact of what he had done, and he even acknowledged the possible harm to our communities.

Over the last several months, Nate has shared with me his plans and hopes for the future. We've talked about his possibilities for employment after incarceration, his desire to get a bachelor's degree, and how he can revisit his aspirations to get involved in the community through music and faith.

As an attorney in good standing with the utmost respect for the judicial process, I would not submit this letter in support of Nate if it was not a genuine expression of my opinion of his character. I hope that it can be taken into consideration during sentencing. I do not believe Nate is an ongoing harm to society, and I believe that he wants to spend the rest of his life improving through his own personal development, positive contributions to his community, and in compliance with the law.

I invite you to reach out to me personally should you have any additional questions about Nate's character.

Sincerely,

Grace M. Nickels



[gracemnickels@gmail.com](mailto:gracemnickels@gmail.com)  
(630) 207-7469

Dear Your Honor,

My name is Jeff Miro and I am writing this character reference letter regarding Nathaniel(Nate) Butler-Ludwig and work for Shoreline Sightseeing in downtown Chicago. I began working in the industry in 2010 and began working at Shoreline Sightseeing as a captain in Spring of 2014 and began a role in management in the fall of 2015 in Shoreline Water Taxi Department before being promoted to my current role in 2018. I was born and raised in Mt. Prospect IL and currently reside in Chicago IL with my 4 year old son Noah Miro, of whom I have full legally custody of and is the center of my universe.

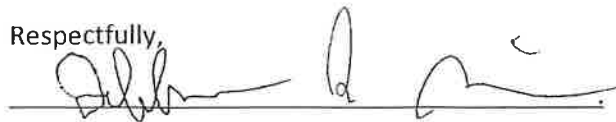
I am currently the Operations Manager/Department Head for our Michigan Ave Location, 3 Tour Vessels(85'-100', 100 ton Diesel Reduction Propulsion Vessels), and the employees on board these vessels. My current role includes staffing(interviewing, hiring, constructing weekly schedules, promotions, disciplinary actions, seasonal layoffs, etc) and overseeing training/performance of 55+ employees, (Captains, Senior Deckhands, Deckhands, Bartenders and Dockhands), overseeing daily operations of the dock and 3 vessels, the Company Facility Security Officer(FSO), the Assistant Administrator of our companies Safety Management System, maintaining customer relations at our dock, among other roles here at the company.

I am a current board member of the Non Profit Organization the Chicago Harbor Safety Committee as the Passenger Vessel Sector Representative, which partners with Local/Federal Agencies such as the Chicago Marine Police, Chicago Fire Department, US Coast Guard, IL state Police, FBI, Chicago OEMC, and MWRD. I am the Passenger Vessel Sector Representative and represent the Tour Boat Companies and Charter Boat Companies in the Chicago Land Area on behalf of this committee.

Mr. Butler worked as a lead deckhand under my supervision as a captain and manager in Shorelines Water Taxi Department, from August 2014 to August 2017. For almost all of 2015 Nate was the our "go to" employee on the commuter shift, which began earlier than our regular shifts and carrying passengers to work before and during rush hour. The commuter shift was the only shift in the company where deckhands collected cash(normally ticket agents do so) and shifts began at 5:45am (before any other employees arrived at Shoreline Sightseeing, including management), so for these 2 main reasons we would only schedule the most punctual and reliable Captain/Deckhand. Nate was always dependable to arrive on time then and never had any discrepancies in his cash bank. He also worked any and all Weekend, Holiday and night shifts he was scheduled during our season. All marine employees at Shoreline are seasonal and Nate worked for 3 years until the end of August in 2017. For these reasons I have stated I always found Nate to be an honest, trustworthy, and dependable employee. We have a wide demographical employee pool at Shoreline Sightseeing and Nate was always able to work with any Captain and Deckhand he was scheduled with.

I have always known Mr. Butler to be a thoughtful and kind human being and truly believe he will be able to move forward past these circumstances and has learned from mistakes he has made.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jeff Miro", written over a horizontal line.

Captain Jeffrey Douglas Miro

7/26/2024



Dear Your Honor,

My name is Celsa Sandoval and I met Nate while working at Whole Foods Market. I'm currently working on my second bachelor's degree and to help pay for school I had to transition from working part time hours to becoming a fulltime team member. This transition for me happened in November 2023, this time was an unsettling one as I was towards the end of finishing my first semester of nursing school. I was fortunate enough to land a supervisor position that would be beneficial economically, however as the youngest supervisor and being the same age as most of the other cashiers I was out of my element. From the very beginning Nate was very supportive of my new role in ways he's not aware of. He was always exceptionally reliable and flexible and was always a team player when the team was short staffed or when the lines were in shambles.

I've worked as a cashier with Whole Foods Market for two years and in that time, I have worked with a great number of individuals and it is so rare to have a coworker like Nate who from the beginning was not only a fast learner and ready to jump in, but was helpful in training and shadowing new team members who needed support while working on the registers. Nate's attitude and first question to me during our shifts together was "Whatever it is you need" and "what will help you most". He's a welcoming person and asking for help from him was never received wrongly or rudely. Nate's a sociable person even when individuals could be quite tricky to help. As a cashier he has had his fair share of customers who were difficult to bag for or ring out and yet each of his interactions were always positive ones and his friendliness never faltered. He is still a top cashier at our location with his metric numbers for transactions setting him aside from even individuals who have been with the company for years. His metrics have differentiated his work ethic even against other supervisors so much so that he was asked if he would like to train in a different position that even seasoned team members have not been trained for.

Nate is an individual who cares and is honest. An elderly customer had left her purse at his register once and although it was exceptionally busy when his next customer pointed out the purse left behind, Nate immediately retrieved the purse from the customer and ran towards the exit looking for the owner. Although I was bagging for Nate it was warming to see someone care that much. Usually as a supervisor a cashier will just hand me something a customer left behind and I would log it in our Lost and Found at the customer service desk, however, Nate really did care enough and wanted to make sure that the correct customer received her purse which at such a big store this was difficult at times. Nate is honest in many ways, even in just his response to something as simple as how his day is going. He's generous, there was this one time I was purchasing spaghetti at his lane with the idea of making it when I got home. My card had declined with a \$1.39 purchase and he quietly as to not embarrass me asked if I needed him to pay for it, luckily, I had just used the incorrect card however I recall feeling both embarrassed and thankful.



Although he is relatively quiet and shy Nate is the biggest empath I've met, sometimes I would arrive to work an hour or almost two early after my class would end and if Nate would be in the breakroom, he would ask how my day was. I would recount how I had maybe a test or two that week or that I haven't had time to study as my two days off one was a 12-hour clinical, and I haven't exactly slept yet. He would always listen and just reiterate that it may seem tough now but that in a year's time I would have my degree and that I was doing great at handling my new full time supervisor position on top of my fulltime schoolwork.

In the months Nate and I have worked together we have had our fair share of discussing our personal lives, especially when one or the other would help bag. Nate was quick to give his condolences upon hearing that my dad passed when I was a kid, at the age of six years old well that's all I really know in life now. He told me that his parents were divorced and that it was better that way. His family life wasn't exactly the greatest and his sister seemed to ultimately make it harder for the family to feel like a family with her jabs and overall behavior. I know he would make sure to visit his parents often even if it meant having to commute relatively far from his own apartment, there was the commitment his sister didn't reciprocate towards his older parents. I know Nate is especially close to his grandmother, he's mentioned before that he's unsure and worried about how she will handle the news mentally, physically and emotionally.

In our discussion of school, or rather when Nate would ask me about my day I did ask if he ever pursued or planned to. I know that he has an associate in art and that he loves photography and digital design. He did enjoy school even if he did struggle being diagnosed on the autism spectrum, he mentioned he hoped to return but was unsure if he would continue the arts side of it or not. Although he has struggled in school and socially, he would always mention how therapy was helping him. The idea of therapy intrigued me as he mentioned that he would meet often and had for a while now so much so that it helped him sober up. In fact, he encouraged me to look into it as individuals can always benefit from it even if its small things at times.

The thing that I strongly believe anybody can appreciate about Nate is his honesty. He has been open with me about his case as he has with other team members and members in leadership. He has been open about what his days look like and the grueling wait he had to endure during this time for him. Although he has stated that every day is a mentally taxing challenge, he is always positive to those around him, he is open about his mistakes and his attempts at positive changes in his life before and especially during his wait. He has talked about his goals and hopes for the future, and I hope that he knows that he will always have a friend in now and especially in the future. It will be my turn to be supportive of his educational journey while navigating the challenges of life.

Sincerely your honor,

Celsa Sandoval

*Celsa Sandoval*

August 8<sup>th</sup>, 2024

To: Judge John Kness

From: Galina Shevchenko  
Associate Professor  
Digital Multimedia Design  
DMD Area Coordinator  
Department of Art & Architecture  
Harold Washington College  
[gshevchenko@ccc.edu](mailto:gshevchenko@ccc.edu)

Dear Your Honor, Judge John Kness!

My name is Galina Shevchenko and I am an Associate Professor of Digital Multimedia Design at Harold Washington College. I met Nathaniel Butler-Ludwig in 2018 when he started taking design courses with me at Harold Washington College. Nathaniel has been my student from the Fall of 2018 through the Fall of 2020. In total, Nathaniel took seven following classes with me:

- DMD168 Computer Art
- Art 176 Graphic Design
- DMD268 Advanced Computer Art
- DMD130 Introduction to Multimedia Design and Development
- DMD131 Beginning Multimedia Design and Development
- DMD233 Advanced Multimedia Design and Development
- DMD299 Portfolio and Professional Practice

Nathaniel was an excellent student. Creative, dedicated and committed. Nathaniel came up with beautiful ideas and took most of his projects beyond requirements which earned him excellent grades and respect among his peers and teachers.

The excellence of Nathaniel as a student and as an artist could be manifested by the fact that his artwork was selected and published in the 2020 Edition of HWC Art and Literary magazine, *Garland Court Review*.

Besides being a dedicated learner, Nathaniel was also a generous supporter to his fellow students. He did great with his dedication and creative contributions to the class group projects; participated in critiques, gave a lot of support and constructive feedback to his peers.

During COVID, in the Fall of 2020, HWC DMD program, was one of the only programs at Harold Washington College that run all the classes in person. We made this decision so that we could provide access to the program equipment and computers to all of our students. We took all the precautions, worked in masks, face shields and rubber gloves between the three computer labs, to accommodate for social distancing and provide software and equipment access to the students in our program.

As a program coordinator, I was committed to provide equitable access and assure all of our students' safety.

It was truly a courageous endeavor on the part of our faculty and our students. Everyone's commitment was paramount.

Nathaniel was a part of this Covid cohort, taking his final class in the program, and graduating with his DMD degree. Students in this COVID cohort had been the most generous, the most caring to each other and the most dedicated students in my teaching experience.

Nobody got sick, everyone was committed to make it through, and Nathaniel was one of the most dedicated ones. He was determined to come to class, do the work and help his peers along the way. Nathaniel has a great sense of humor and his jokes were truly encouraging and cheering and helped immensely in those difficult times.

Through his studies Nathaniel trusted me as a teacher and as an individual, and confided that he was struggling with depression. I always helped him with encouragement and made sure to support him with reminders and cheers. COVID times were brutal, and I remember Nathaniel telling me how our program and the classes he was taking with me helped him survive and gave him a good purpose.

Despite his depression, Nathaniel's commitment, perseverance, professional attitude and good humor helped him succeed in the program and establish positive relationships with his peers.

From my experience of knowing Nathaniel, I believe in him being a positive, committed and creative individual that is capable to contribute to a good purpose and I am confident that he is generous and truthful in his commitment.

Sincerely,

*Galina Shevchenko, July 1, 2024*

July 1, 2024

**Galina Shevchenko**  
**Associate Professor**  
Digital Multimedia Design Coordinator  
Department of Art & Architecture  
Harold Washington College  
[gshevchenko@ccc.edu](mailto:gshevchenko@ccc.edu)  
(773)8187438

Dear Your Honor,

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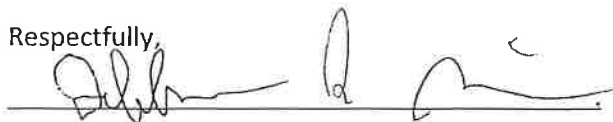
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I am a current board member of the Non Profit Organization the Chicago Harbor Safety Committee as the Passenger Vessel Sector Representative, which partners with Local/Federal Agencies such as the Chicago Marine Police, Chicago Fire Department, US Coast Guard, IL state Police, FBI, Chicago OEMC, and MWRD. I am the Passenger Vessel Sector Representative and represent the Tour Boat Companies and Charter Boat Companies in the Chicago Land Area on behalf of this committee.

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Captain Jeffrey Douglas Miro

7/26/2024